

cancelled without prejudicing the applicants' rights to pursue such subject matter via a file divisional application.

The only issues to be resolved are the Examiner's rejections advanced under 35 USC §103(a). In this regard, pending claims 51-59 attracted a rejection under 35 USC §103(a) as allegedly "obvious" from Helwig et al (USP 6,054,022) in view of Weeks (USP 5,409,573). Ogata et al (USP 5,698,479) has been combined with Helwig et al and Weeks to separately rejection claim 60 under that same statutory provision. Applicants suggest, however, that the applied references of record do not render the claims pending herein "obvious" pursuant to the proper standards of review for 35 USC §103(a).

Firstly, with respect to the applied Helwig reference, applicants note that the Examiner is only partially correct in asserting that Helwig is not specific with regard to particular composition of the sizing agent, citing to column 6, lines 8-11. However, the Examiner has apparently overlooked a significant property of the washing agent. Specifically, the cited passages in Helwig teach that "sufficient time must be allowed for the sizing to wash off the fibers". Furthermore, on line 13 of column 6 of Helwig, it is stated that the composition of the sizing has an effect on said 'washing-off' time. In other words, the sizing is such that it can be washed off, and as a result, the sizing **cannot** be "substantially water insoluble" as required by the claims pending herein. Simply stated, the entire passage in Helwig speaks to the ability of sizing to be physically washed off.

This same technical feature is confirmed in the same column 6, lines 29 onwards. This passage teaches that the process is wet-laid, and that when mats comprising bundles of fibers are produced, hydrophobic agents are used. The purpose of the hydrophobic agents is to prevent the contact of water and the sizing. This is clarified in the same passage, which teaches that surfactants are added to the slurry so that the surfactant emulsifies the hydrophobic agent such that, when the water of the

slurry comes into subsequent contact with the fiber bundles, it washes off the sizing and allows fibers to disperse.

While applicants' process employs surfactants also, such surfactants are used to form the foam, while maintaining the fiber bundles. In other words, the sizing applicants use in their manufacturing process is passive with respect to the surfactant. The surfactant does not disperse the applicants' fiber bundles.

As to the Weeks reference, applicants note that it discusses fiber dispersion where "wet chop glass strand consisting of bundles of numerous aligned glass fibers adhered with a sizing agent, with thermoplastic resin particles in the form of fine denier, short cut wettable staple fibers" are co-dispersed (column 1, lines 65-68). The more one studies the Weeks' specification the more clear it becomes that the purpose is to **disperse** the fiber bundles, whereby the final product has little if any fiber bundles. The Examiner's attention is directed, for example, to column 2, lines 51-58, "**dispersion** of the fiber bundles is greatly enhanced"; column 3, lines 9-10, "glass and thermoplastic fibers are **dispersed** in water'; and column 4, lines 22-26; column 4, lines 45-55, where the entire dispersion process is described. The rate of dispersion is discussed at column 7, lines 32-33, where it is noted that the remaining bundles, if they can even be called as bundles contain only a few fibers.

Thus, in applicants' view, as discussed above, the applied Helwig reference does not disclose at all the concept of using a "water insoluble sizing" as required by the claims pending herein. Nor does the applied Weeks reference disclose that bundles may be employed for mat formation. Thus, the language of claims 51-59 unequivocally distinguishes the present invention over the applied Helwig and Weeks references.

The cited Ogata reference fails to cure the deficiencies of Helwig and Weeks noted above. As such, claim 60 is likewise allowable along with claims 51-59.

Every effort has been made to advance prosecution of this application to allowance. Therefore, in view of the comments above, applicants suggest that claims

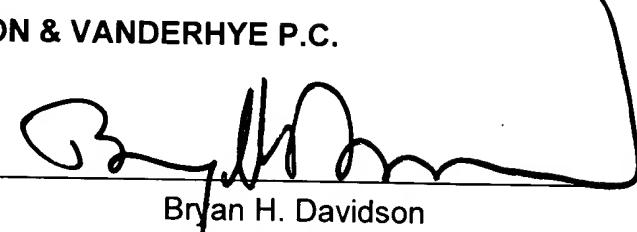
**RÖKMAN et al**  
Serial No. 09/543,534

51-60 pending herein are in condition for allowance and Official Notice to that effect is solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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